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Subject: The high value of funding public education through the CCSU System

Honorable members of the committee:

I address you as an 11-year citizen of Connecticut, a voter, a tax payer, the father of three (2 high school juniors and a gap year, soon-to-be college student) and as a professor at Central Connecticut State University. I teach Entrepreneurship, Business Strategy and Leadership at CCSU.

Prior to making Connecticut my home I have lived in Alabama, Tennessee, Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia. I have held my job at CCSU for almost twice as long as any previous job. I love my students and feel proud of my work here. It has been a good place to raise my children. I expect at least two of my daughters will attend a CSU school. I perceive the level of corruption in this state to be substantially lower than just about everywhere else I have lived (though that bar may not be set very high). I would like to work here through my retirement...another 7 to 10 years from now. This is to let you know that I speak with affection and concern for my adopted home state.

I speak to you today about a matter of utmost importance – the economic future of this state. While we may live in the “land of steady habits”, the world has been in fast forward, disrupted by technology, communication, transportation, free trade, and social change. If Connecticut wants to become more than a bedroom community and feeder system for New York and Boston, more than a retirement home for those without sufficient means to retire elsewhere, more than an Appalachia-north, we need to invest in our young people such that they both want to stay and have the skills to drag us into the 21st Century. That requires education!

I teach kids who are hungry to make a difference in their world, in this state. The CCSU students (and others in the CCSU/Board or Regents system) come from the state and stay in the state: over 93% of our students are state residents; over 85% stay in CT after graduation. Those students are voters and tax payers. Over 75% have jobs within 9 months of graduation.

Moreover, many students start businesses that create jobs. Last spring I was working with Senator Fonfara on what became Public Act 16-3. When I asserted our graduates probably produced more jobs than UConn graduates; he asked me to validate that. So I asked five recent alumni entrepreneurs who were scheduled to speak at an event on campus how many jobs they had created. The total was over 120 jobs. And, every one of the entrepreneur-alumni credited their CCSU education with helping them in their success. This was a small, convenience sample, but it reflects the reality that our student start businesses that create jobs.

Part of what I love about my job is the drive I see in my students. I estimate 90% of them work at least part-time while in school. Some of them start businesses – while in school. They work 20-50 hours per week...while taking full loads. Employers know our students will work hard. There are no silver spoons in the mouths of our students or our faculty.

Yet, that work load takes a toll on students. With rising tuition, the high cost of books, the high cost of living in Connecticut, they need those jobs just to get by. And, many of them still graduate with heavy debt.

We cannot afford to keep raising tuition. For highly qualified students, we are seeing instances where it will be less expensive for them to attend a private school, usually in another state, than attend one of our colleges. For the other students, we push them into debt and cause them to work harder and focus more narrowly in their education. In both instances, the state loses. Public education is no longer a bargain and we struggle to serve the state.

If we continue to raise tuition we will fall further behind. Some might say the next step is to cut faculty, cut benefits, cut pay, and therefore cut quality. And make no mistake, the financial cuts will cost in terms of quality. While faculty are already significantly under-paid compared to their private sector options, there is a point where our commitment to service becomes a sacrifice that we and our families may not want to bear.

I love my job. I love knowing I change individual lives and our economic and civic future. I don't love that, adjusted for inflation, I am earning about \$36,000 less per year than I did in my last private sector job...in 1986!

I urge you to support Connecticut's future. Fund our programs, fund our future-building initiatives, like an Entrepreneurship Center at CCSU, like our new program in Gerontology, like our cutting edge programs in Biomolecular Science, like our expanding MBA program. The Board of Regents Universities are a bargain for the state compared to UConn and private universities. Cutting us is the least efficient, least effective thing you could do.

While I perceive that this forum is about funding higher education, I would be happy to meet with any of you to discuss the whole economic structure of the state and how we might find our way out of the bind we now face...without sacrificing our future by de-funding education.